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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003353

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STATE PASS AIT/W

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER ASKS FOR CLARIFICATION OF
SECRETARY'S MEDIA INTERVIEW

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Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Mark Chen asked the AIT Director to a meeting October 26 to seek clarification over a set of interviews given by Secretary Powell in Beijing on October 24. Chen said the Secretary's reported statements on eventual reunification and Taiwan's lack of sovereignty deeply "hurt the feelings of the Taiwanese people" and appeared to be a departure from past U.S. policies and commitments. Chen requested that the USG make further public clarifications over the matter in order to avoid further damage to the relationship. The Director responded that there has been no change in U.S. policy nor did the Secretary intend to signal one. He added that the Secretary's visit to Beijing was aimed at advancing cross-Straits dialogue and defending Taiwan's right to participate in APEC and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Director cautioned, however, that repeated public statements over Taiwan's sovereignty led reporters to press the Secretary on the question of Taiwan's sovereignty, an issue we have long sought to avoid speaking about openly. End Summary.

Clarification, Not a Protest

12. (C) Foreign Minister Mark Chen asked the AIT Director in for an urgent meeting October 26 regarding a set of interviews Secretary Powell gave on October 24 in Beijing. Chen emphasized that the meeting was to seek further clarification, and he did not intend to deliver a formal protest. Chen noted that the government was under intense pressure from the media and Legislative Yuan (LY) over the Secretary's statement that Taiwan was not a sovereign

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independent country and suggestion that the USG supports eventual unification. Chen stated that the reason the Secretary's statements had caused so much harm to the Taiwan

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people was that they came from the United States, Taiwan's best friend. "If it was China or anyone else, we could understand it," he added, "but coming from the United States, it is a deep shock." Chen said he was especially surprised that the U.S. made such a "heavy" statement after months of effort on Taipei's part to reopen dialogue with Beijing.

Violation of the Six Assurances?

13. (C) Chen noted that the State Department Spokesman's October 25 clarification addressed Taipei's concern over the reference to reunification. Chen asserted, however, that the Secretary's remarks about Taiwan's sovereignty appeared to

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violate the "Six Assurances" provided to Taiwan by the United States in 1982. Chen said that he could tell the media and public that U.S. policy has not changed, but no one would believe him because the Secretary's statement on Taiwan's sovereignty did depart from the long-standing USG practice of remaining silent on the issue of Taiwan's status. Chen asserted that the Secretary's statement would undermine the Taipei government's attempts to build a consensus behind renewed dialogue with Beijing and give the PRC less reason to engage with Taipei.

14. (C) The Director responded that the "Six Assurances" only committed the United States not to change its position on Taiwan's status, not whether or not it would state what that position is. He noted that the Secretary's statement that Taiwan is not a sovereign, independent country reflects a policy that has been in place since 1978. The Director acknowledged that we try to avoid having to publicly explain our position, but pointed out that Taiwan's status only became a major public issue after President Chen Shui-bian and other senior Taiwan officials repeatedly drew attention to it. The Director reminded FM Chen that the Secretary's comments came in response to a quite specific question about whether the U.S. endorsed President Chen's recent assertion

that Taiwan is a sovereign and independent country. He added that Taipei's insistence on this formulation has also provided Beijing an excuse not to respond to Taiwan's recent offers to restart dialogue.

Managing the Media

15. (C) The Foreign Minister said he took the Director's point, but stated that "it is too much to ask" for President Chen or his ministers to deny they represent a sovereign and independent country. However, Chen insisted that the most important task at hand was to prevent the episode from further damaging the relationship. In this context, Chen requested that the Secretary "or one of his deputies" find an opportunity in the coming days to fully clarify the U.S. position.

16. (C) The Director said he would convey this request, but suggested that Chen and other Taiwan leaders take a more active role in shaping the public response. The Director noted that the purpose of the Secretary's visit to Beijing was not to give media interviews, but to press Beijing on issues of concern to Taipei. In addition to encouraging Beijing to respond positively to President Chen's October 10 address, the Director said the Secretary pressed PRC leaders on Taipei's participation in APEC and the WHO and restated that we would not yield to demands to cease arms sales. The Director asserted that if Taiwan focuses on the positive elements of the relationship, it will demonstrate the strength of ties between the two sides. However, if it dwells on issues where we differ, such as Taiwan's status, it will only increase attention to differences.

Media Groundrules

17. (C) Chen said that he would be talking to the media later in the day, but promised to keep the Director's meeting out of the press. However, as the meeting closed, there was a reporter waiting outside of Chen's office to take still photos of the Director and Foreign Minister departing. AIT will report media reaction Septel.

Comment: Damage Control Overdrive

18. (C) The Foreign Minister and other senior officials remain in a high state of agitation over the media and political fallout from the Secretary's interview. FM Chen was clearly seeking a more public USG clarification of the Secretary's remarks rather than insights into why they may have been made. Chen did acknowledge the broader policy context, but only after several attempts were made to frame the issue for him. Even then, however, his mind was focused on how to get the issue off the front pages before his next appearance before the LY and how to phrase the U.S. stance to his boss, President Chen.

PAAL